

Resort made canyon a hot spot

Page A8 — THE DAILY HERALD, (www.HarkTheHerald.com), Provo, Utah, Wednesday, June 20, 2001

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Editor's note: This is the second of a four-part series on Provo Canyon history.

By JOSEPHINE ZIMMERMAN
The Daily Herald

PROVO — Billy Ferguson, who is known for naming Provo Canyon's Vivian Park and operating a cafe and hotel at Frazier Park, died in 1896 when a massive snowslide slid down the mountain and destroyed his home.

Before his untimely death, he had deeded his 160 acres to L.L. Nunn of Telluride Power Company on condition that Ferguson move out by March 1, 1896. Ironically, just 13 days before that date, the massive snowslide took his life.

Under the ownership of Nunn, Vivian Park and Frazier Park were operated by James W. Slick, a promoter and entrepreneur. At that time the area was known as South Fork. Slick had cattle and sheep and used the area for grazing.

In the next few years, Slick developed a resort, which became particularly popular for outings and institutes.

Newspaper articles of the period told of many activities at the resort in glowing terms, and noted that visitors were transported to the resort by train.

"A conservative estimate places the number at 2,000 and one could not conceive of a more orderly crowd."

— 1901 Salt Lake Tribune

In August 1901, the Salt Lake Tribune carried the following account of an excursion for employees of the Rio Grande Western Railroad:

"Upon arriving the excursionists filled the spacious dining hall, feasted upon trout, chicken, ice cream and fruits in profusion, picnicked in the grove, fished in the Provo River, strolled through the resort, danced in the pavilion and found amusement in a variety of ways.

"The feasting over, a programme was rendered in the dancing pavilion, consisting of songs, speeches, dancing, prize, waltzing, foot races, etc.

"The Star Silver Band of Taylorsville accompanied the pleasure seekers and discoursed excellent music during the afternoon.

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The excursionists were greatly delighted with the resort and the royal reception given, and expressed a

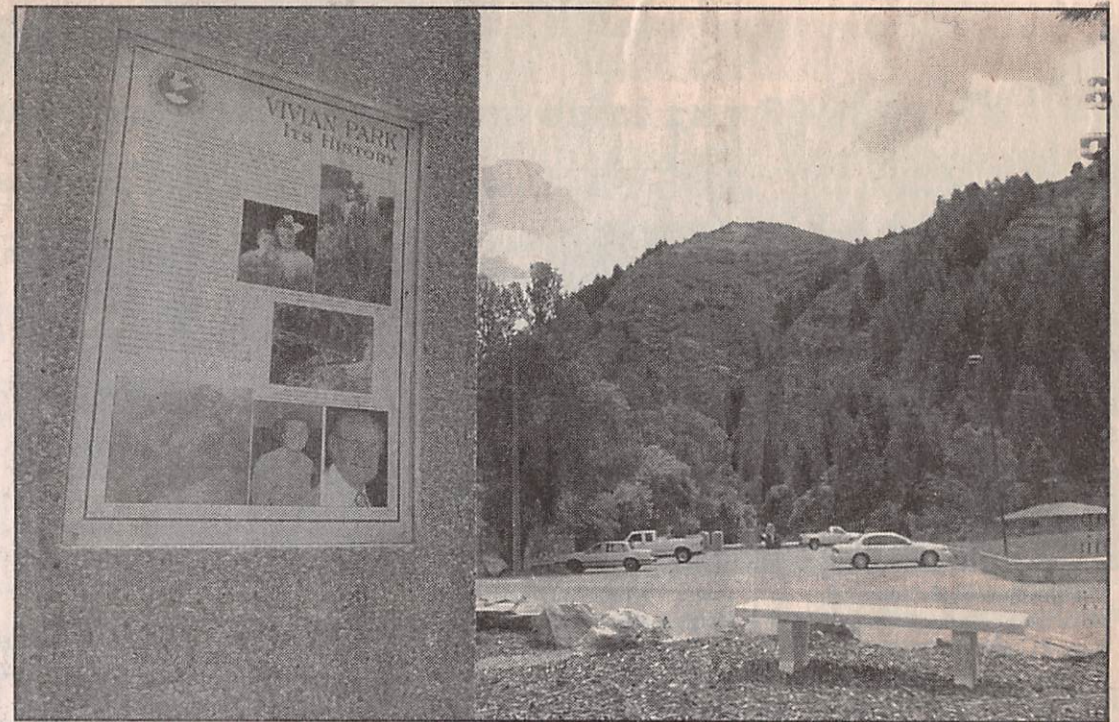
determination of returning the next year.

The newspaper also advertised: "South Fork in Beautiful Provo Canyon. Grand scenery, cool, invigorating air, best fishing in state. Trains stop at resort. Fine large tents for rent, furnished or unfurnished. Good board at low rates. Trout dinners, private dining rooms. Address J.W. Slick, Provo."

The Daily Inquirer also reported in August 1896 that there were a large number of campers at South Fork. "The breezes up the canyon are a wonderful nerve tonic," the paper reported.

The Utonion in 1897 reported: "There was a grand time spent in Provo Canyon Sunday evening by those fortunate enough to be at the mouth of South Fork. There were 86 present in all, and a jollier crowd would be hard to find."

A book by Merle S. Foote, Pleasant Grove, recalls: "Vivian Park over a period of time was one of the beauty spots of the west. It was a



KEVIN LEE/The Daily Herald

Hot spot: Entrepreneur James W. Slick developed a resort in Provo Canyon at Vivian Park and Frazier Park around 1900.

park where ward reunions, family parties and picnics were enjoyed by hundreds of people every summer. An artistic rustic fence enclosed an area of shady lawn with picnic tables, benches and a dance hall. Also boats were available for rides on the pond."

Records show the Slicks resided in the Vivian Park area for several years, then moved to California and settled in the Glendale area.

Local residents have related pleasant memories of staying at the beautiful

park, dancing at the dance hall and eating at a "very uptown" restaurant where the male waiters wore white gloves.

Others tell of boating on Vivian Pond, fishing along the river, riding horseback, riding a push-around merry-go-round, and swimming in a pond created when a large boulder fell into the Provo River. Numerous reunions, ward outings and other activities were held there, and in the winter there was an ice skating rink.

Edna Carter Purvance

and Grover Purvance, who owned the park in the '30s and '40s, built cabins along the creek, and later built The Chalet, which operated until recently when the Utah Department of Transportation condemned it for a road widening project.

Cabins built on the small lots in Vivian Park were primarily fishing cabins for summer use only. In recent years, homeowners have built larger dwellings for year-round use, often combining some of the small lots to achieve enough land for a permanent home.

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